

Welsh Government support drives increased exports

Laser Wise Solutions in Treforest, OsteoPlus and Energist in Swansea and Airbond in Pontypool have all seen significant increases in their export business after receiving support from the Welsh Government's EU supported Export Assist programme.

Speaking about their success the Economy Secretary said:

"Exporting really does have the potential to transform a business and take it to the next level. Companies such as Laser Wise Solutions, Osteoplus, Airbond and Energist are all great examples of just what can be achieved when companies looking to increase their exports have access to the right advice, guidance and support.

"And increasing the value of exports and the number of exporters in Wales is even more important than ever as the UK prepares to leave the EU.

"The Welsh Government is keen to work with companies looking to build up the exports arm of their operations and offer them the right support for wherever they may be in their business development.

"I want to help them replicate the sort of increase in exports already experienced by companies like Laser Wise Solutions and would urge companies interested in growing their exports to get in touch for more information on the programme of tailored support on offer."

Laser Wise Solutions design and manufacture laser stripping systems from their base in Treforest. Following support from the Export Assist programme, including participating in Welsh Government led trade missions to the US, they have seen their businesses grow from a £1.5m turnover in 2016 to 2.2m in 2017.

Since accessing Welsh Government support the company has won £791.5k worth of business in the USA, £31.2k in Mexico, £71k in China and £84k in the Philippines.

In Swansea OsteoPlus, a company that designs and develops surgical instruments, has secured an additional £130k of business from the USA, while Energist, the UK's leading developer and manufacturer of advanced light and laser technology systems for use in medical and cosmetic procedures, has picked up £725,000 of business from the Far East.

In Pontypool, Airbond, a manufacture of composite materials for the aerospace and automotive industries has won £11,000 worth of additional business from the Far East.

OsteoPlus, Energist and Airbond all received support from the Welsh Government and EU funded Export Assist programme which ran between 2009 and 2015.

The programme supported companies looking to export through a mixture of mentoring and training, advice on trade and choosing the right market, trade missions, exhibitions and overseas business development visits.

[Red route gets green light as part of major Deeside infrastructure investment](#)

The scheme, which aims to modernise and relieve pressure on the stretch, will see increased capacity on the existing A548, with a new road linking the A55 and A548 just after the Flintshire Bridge. It forms part of over £650m of Welsh Government infrastructure improvements in North Wales, with Deeside in particular benefiting from unprecedented Welsh Government investment.

Economy and Infrastructure Secretary Ken Skates said:

“I’m delighted to announce the red route as my preferred option to address the congestion problem in the Deeside Corridor, A55/A494/A548, area.

“Having taken full account of the technical, social, economic and environmental aspects of the scheme and listened to the consultation responses, I’m confident that this significant investment will address the existing problems and compliment improvements across the Deeside area.

“The next steps will be to develop a preliminary design, which considers the environmental and engineering issues in more detail and looks to address some of the issues raised during the consultation.

“I’m hopeful that this can all be completed quickly, with businesses and commuters feeling the benefit of this project at the earliest opportunity, strengthening the social and economic links across North Wales, the Deeside Industrial Estate, Chester and beyond in the process.”

The Economy Secretary also announced he would be progressing the delivery of the A494 River Dee Bridge Improvement scheme to investigate options to resolve the existing traffic bottleneck and overcome issues with the existing bridge.

On rail connectivity he said he would be commissioning further work with Network Rail on a new Deeside Parkway and the co-location of Shotton High at Shotton Low at a new integrated station. This would enable a seamless interchange for passengers wanting to change between the Wrexham – Bidston line and the North Wales Coast mainline.

In conjunction with Flintshire Council and Network Rail we will develop a scheme for a new Deeside Parkway station to improve access to the business park, including the introduction of park and ride provision. Facilities for road freight traffic will also be considered.

This builds on the over £1m awarded to Flintshire Council in March to improve bus services and encourage walking and cycling in Deeside. Part of this money will be spent on developing bus interchanges, bus priority measures on the B5129 Shotton Corridor and bus infrastructure on Deeside Business Park, while the remainder will support the introduction of active travel routes within the Deeside Business Park.

This is all in addition further investment of £4.7m to support the Northern Gateway and continue with building additional road infrastructure to open land for development and attract further businesses to locate at the site.

He said

“The investment and initiatives I have outlined will go a long way to address the barriers to accessing jobs in the Deeside Hub. They will also form one of the building blocks that will deliver a North East Wales Metro vision of a well-connected and high quality integrated transport system, which maximises active travel opportunities, something which will provide huge benefits for the region.”

New plan for national mission to raise standards – Kirsty Williams

The Education Secretary has revealed details of a plan to continue to raise standards, reduce the attainment gap and deliver an education system that is a source of national pride and public confidence.

Objectives also include introducing a new accountability model and ensuring strong and inclusive schools committed to excellence and well-being.

The plan sets out the actions the Welsh Government will continue to take to keep improving the education system, including:

- Reducing class sizes
- Reforming teacher training
- Strengthening support for learners with Additional Learning Needs
- Establishing a national approach to long-term career development for teachers
- Establishing a new National Academy for Educational Leadership
- Reducing unnecessary bureaucracy for teachers
- Investing £1.1 billion to upgrade the quality of school buildings.

The Education Secretary also set out a revised timeline for introducing the new Curriculum for Wales, with statutory roll out to schools now set to begin in 2022 to give the teaching profession and schools more time to help develop, and prepare for, the changes.

The new curriculum will be introduced from nursery to Year 7 in 2022, rolling into Year 8 in 2023, Year 9 in 2024, Year 10 in 2025 and Year 11 in 2026. All schools will have access the final curriculum from 2020, to allow them to move towards full roll-out in 2022.

Kirsty Williams said:

“We are entering a fast-changing world that is increasingly competitive, globally connected and technologically advanced. Schools have to prepare our young people for jobs that have not yet been created and challenges that we are yet to encounter. Education has never been more important and, working with the teaching profession, we will continue our national mission to raise standards.

“Our plan is aimed at ensuring every young person in Wales has an equal opportunity to reach the highest standards and their full potential. We can’t achieve those ambitions if we just stand still. Teachers and educators across our system are working together to raise standards and reduce the attainment gap. It is an exciting time to be involved in education in Wales.

“We all share a responsibility to inspire and challenge the next generation. That is why we will support teachers with continuous learning and development, better support and identify our leaders, and reduce class sizes so that we can raise standards for all.”

Commenting on the new curriculum, she added:

“Since becoming Education Secretary I have visited schools across

the country, spoken to a range of teachers, parents and experts and held talks with unions.

“It’s the right decision to introduce the curriculum as a phased roll-out rather than a ‘big bang’, and for that to start in 2022. This approach, and an extra year, will mean all schools have the time to engage with the development of the curriculum and be full prepared for the changes. As the OECD have recommended, we will continue our drive to create a curriculum for the 21st century.”

Legendary summer enjoyed by tourism in Wales

Record-breaking visitor figures were recorded at Cadw sites as well as the best ever figures being achieved for Amgueddfa Cymru sites.

Tourism businesses in Wales have enjoyed a successful summer. 40% received more visitors than last summer, which in itself was a much better summer than 2015 – and a similar proportion (39%) received the same level.

Figures from Cadw show record-breaking summer visitor figures, partly generated as a result of the Cadw Dragons’ tour across its historic sites, which was part of Wales Year of Legends activity.

The figures show that more than half a million visitors explored Cadw sites during July and August this year – the highest number ever welcomed during the summer season and an increase of 8.2% compared with summer 2016.

This figure contributes to a total of more than 900,000 visitors welcomed since April 2017 – an increase of 12% against the same period last year. This means that annual visitors are on track to reach 1.5 million for the first time by the end of the year.

The success is in part attributed to Cadw’s Live the Legends campaign which brought a family of Welsh Dragons to life in celebration of Wales’s 2017 Year of Legends. As a whole, the Dragons’ summer presence helped generate a 15% increase in family visitors versus July and August last year – from 87,333 in 2016 to 101,051 in 2017. The Dragon campaign also saw the launch of Little Dragons – an augmented reality smartphone game which allows visitors to ‘snap’ virtual dragons at seven castles across Wales and to date, has been played by nearly 18,000 users.

Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales also welcomed a record 297,792 visitors to its seven museums in August – the best ever August visitor figure achieved by Amgueddfa Cymru up on August 2016 by 18.9%.

By individual museum, in August, St Fagans had an amazing 117,584 visitors – its second highest figure since 2002 when it had 126,808 visitors, and National Museum Cardiff had a record 76,614 visitors.

Across August and July, National Museum sites attracted half a million visitors (492,845), which is a 17% increase on the same period in 2016 and up by 6.3% on the last record summer in 2012.

Increase in visitors can be attributed to a number of developments including the Dinosaur Babies exhibition at National Museum Cardiff; the re-opening of the main building and new developments at St Fagans National Museum of History as well as the Dino on the Loose campaign.

In addition, a wide variety of reasons have been given for the busy summer generally. The most frequent reasons reported in the Tourism Barometer were businesses' own marketing (23% of businesses with increased visitors) and more British people staying in the UK (16% of those reporting an increase).

Following a busy summer, 82% are feeling confident or fairly confident about the remainder of 2017.

Economy Secretary, Ken Skates, said:

“It’s extremely encouraging that these figures show that 2017 is really proving to be another successful year for tourism in Wales. We’ve seen two very successful years and we’re looking to sustain that growth. Although there is much uncertainty, it’s evident that the weaker pound has meant that more people are opting to holiday at home this year. I’m delighted that the industry is looking forward to the rest of the year with confidence.

“The figures for Cadw and Amgueddfa Cymru, also show that innovative ideas such as the touring dragons and Dino on the Loose can capture the imagination and spark a renewed interest in Welsh heritage – which has been fantastic to see during Wales’ Year of Legends.”

Accommodation occupancy figures over the 12 months ending July 2017 also point towards a busy summer with occupancy for hotels, B&Bs and guesthouses up one percentage point on 2016. Static caravan occupancy saw a rise of 7 percentage points to 84% when compared with the same period in 2016 while touring occupancy rates rose by 5 percentage points.

Latest tourism figures can be found on the following link: <http://gov.wales/docs/caecd/research/2017/170926-wales-tourism-business-barometer-wave-3-2017-en.pdf>.

£4m to drive forward marine and tidal energy development in North Wales

The funding will support Mentor Môn's £5.6m Morlais scheme which will help accelerate the development and commercialisation of multiple tidal stream technologies in the Morlais Demonstration Zone in Anglesey. This will be situated in one of the designated Anglesey Enterprise Zone sites.

The Economy Secretary announced the funding from a UK wide event on marine and tidal energy, held in Cardiff today.

He said:

"The energy generated from wave and tidal flows can play a major role in delivering our ambitions for a Welsh low carbon economy as well as creating sustainable jobs and growth.

"Wales' coastline means we are well positioned to take advantage of the opportunities presented by the blue economy, which is why the Welsh Government is committed to supporting the creation of new tidal demonstration zones that will help industry develop and test new and innovative tidal and wave technologies for commercial success.

"We have already invested EU funds towards a feasibility study for a demonstration zone off the Pembrokeshire coast and today I am pleased to announce £4.2m of EU funds and a further £300,000 from the Welsh Government to support preparatory and consent work on the Morlais demonstration zone in Anglesey.

"Once up and running, the fully consented area of seabed will be able to support at least 20MW of grid connection capacity, but with potential for 193.5MW, to enable developers to deploy and test multiple tidal energy technologies.

"Over the next 5 to 10 years we have a real window of opportunity to develop and grow Wales' marine energy industry. This funding will provide yet another push to drive our ambitions forward."

Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs said,

"Wales' coastline has the second highest tidal range in the world and provides an ideal environment to test and develop emerging tidal energy technologies. We are keen to promote their potential role in renewable energy generation, supporting a prosperous low carbon future for Wales. Menter Môn's success in managing the Demonstration Zone originates in an early community energy project

supported under Ynni'r Fro. Today's announcement is a fantastic boost to the sector and the area, showing the difference clean energy makes to Wales."

Gerallt Llewelyn Jones on behalf of Menter Môn said:

"This is very good news. Menter Môn has worked hard to achieve this important milestone for Anglesey and North Wales. It is critical that we position ourselves at the centre of global developments in marine renewable energy, a known growth sector with substantial employment potential."